

President Delays Polygraph Order Aimed at Leaks

By a WALL STREET JOURNAL Staff Reporter

WASHINGTON—President Reagan has decided to delay carrying out orders calling for the broad use of polygraph tests and lifelong censorship of government employees.

Larry Speakes, White House deputy press secretary, said the president has held up the two provisions, designed to deter leaks of secret data, while the administration discusses a compromise with members of Congress.

Administration officials met to discuss the controversial orders late last month. According to one official present, the group was worried that the orders would hurt the president's image and draw stiff congressional opposition in an election year.

Late last year, Congress barred the administration from carrying out the directives through March 15. Despite the administration's concerns, congressional supporters of that ban were unsure they would be able to renew it.

The directive most bitterly opposed by civil libertarians was the lifelong-censorship order. It would have required that 127,000 current federal employees with access to highly classified data pledge to submit for censorship any writings on intelligence operations or classified data. A much smaller number of officials currently is subject to such restraints.

Critics said the expanded censorship would have a chilling effect on commentary by former officials who might disagree with policies of the administration in power at the time. They also questioned the need for a lifelong restriction, as studies have found only a few examples of sensitive information leaks from former officials. Richard Willard, a Justice Department official who helped write the president's original order, has conceded that the "most serious problem" is leaks by employees who haven't left the government.

The polygraph provision would have encouraged agencies to use the lie detector to track down persons who leaked data and to screen government employees who have access to secrets. It also would repeal a policy that generally prevents agencies from penalizing employees who refuse to take polygraph tests. The Central Intelligence Agency and National Security Agency have been exceptions to that policy, and both regularly use polygraphs on employees.

Under the Carter administration, Justice Department employees were exposed to the threat of "adverse inferences" being drawn against them if they refused to take polygraph exams in probes of leaks. But officials say the department hasn't ever acted on that threat, largely because it lacked confidence in the polygraph's accuracy.

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